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ABSTRACT

Through this lesson, teachers can use children's nonfiction books and the Internet to help their students develop accurate, substantive information about Native American people in the present day. During one 50-minute session, students will: participate in critical discussions about their knowledge of Native Americans; work cooperatively in small groups; access and gather information from Internet Web sites about Native Americans; and share information with others through discussion. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A present-day Native American book list and an ERIC Digest, "Teaching Young Children about Native Americans" (Debbie Reese), are attached. (PM)

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Native Americans Today

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Grade Band

3-5

Estimated Lesson Time

One 50-minute session

Overview

Many people think that Native Americans are a vanished people—that they do not exist in the present day.

Using this lesson plan, teachers can use photo essays to introduce students to Native children and their families, thereby countering the idea that Native people no longer exist.

From Theory to Practice

Bishop, Rudine Sims. 1997 "Selecting Literature for a Multicultural Curriculum." In *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-8 Classroom*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc. Pp. 1-20.

Bishop identified five functions of multicultural literature:

1. provide knowledge or information
2. expand how students view the world by offering varying perspectives
3. promote or develop an appreciation for diversity
4. give rise to critical inquiry
5. illuminate human experience.

This lesson uses literature to provide children with knowledge and information about present-day Native Americans. With this knowledge and information, children will be introduced to different perspectives on family and community, and they will have an informed knowledge base from which to critique stereotypical representations of Native people in their textbooks, literature, television programs, videos, and movies.

Slapin, Beverly, and Seale, Doris. 1992. *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

This collection of articles and annotated citations on Native American books for children can provide useful background information as well as additional texts that students might examine in class.

Student Objectives

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Students will

- participate in critical discussions about their knowledge of Native Americans.
- work cooperatively in small groups.
- access and gather information from Internet Web sites about Native Americans.
- share information with others through discussion.

Resources

- Present-Day Native American Book List
- Teaching Young Children about Native Americans Web Site
- *Indian Country Today* Web Site
- US Native American Data from Census 2000
- "I" Is Not for Indian: The Portrayal of Native Americans in Books for Young People.
- Native American Sites

Instructional Plan

Resources

1. Books from the attached Present-Day Native American Book List that show present-day Native Americans.
2. Internet Web sites and Internet access.

Preparation

1. Select a collection of texts from the book list that show present-day Native Americans.
2. To familiarize yourself with Native American culture, spend time at the Lisa Mitten's Web site of Native American Sites. The site is quite extensive and filled with carefully selected links to sites with accurate and useful information about Native Americans.
3. Specifically, go to these pages, linked to the site:

   Teaching Young Children about Native Americans

   "I" Is Not for Indian: The Portrayal of Native Americans in Books for Young People

   US Native American Data from Census 2000

Instruction and Activities

1. Introduction.
   Begin by writing "Native American," "American Indian," and "Indian" on the board. Introduce each term, and briefly describe its usage (see "Teaching Young Children about Native Americans" for a brief discussion).
2. Brainstorming session.
   Engage students in a brainstorming session during which they share all they know about Native Americans. Create lists of their comments on the board.
3. Small group activity.

Divide the students into small groups and give each group one or two of the books from the book list. Ask them to compare what they generated in the brainstorming list with what they see in the books.

4. Small group activity (Optional).
   If you have Internet access in your classroom, have students explore the images and information at the Internet sites listed above.
5. Class discussion.
   Solicit general comments from the groups regarding their discussions. Move to soliciting specific examples of how their prior knowledge was affirmed or challenged by the material they found in the books. Students could use the interactive Venn diagram tool to map out their findings.

Extensions

1. Students can visit Internet Web sites developed by people of the tribes featured in the books on the book list to learn more about the tribe.
2. Students can locate works of fiction about the tribes featured in the books on the book list, comparing and contrasting the ways the information in the two books are similar or different. They can apply information they gather from the Web sites to their comparison of the two books.
3. Encourage students to read the online version of *Indian Country Today*, the leading Native American publication in the United States. By reading this publication, students can gain an appreciation for topics of interest or concern to Native people today. Students could create a Venn diagram comparing the information that they find in *Indian Country Today* with the information in the *New York Times* or *USA Today*.
4. Invite students to write to publishers, asking for fictionalized works about Native American children in modern day settings.

Web Resources

Native American Sites
http://www.nativeculture.com/lisamitten/indians.html
This Web site of Native American Sites, collected by Lisa Mitten, is quite extensive and filled with carefully selected links to sites with accurate and useful information about Native Americans

Student Assessment/Reflections

1. Observe student interactions as they communicate with each other about as they go through the activities.

2. Engage students in conversations about what they have learned through this lesson.

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

2 - Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.

3 - Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

5 - Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

7 - Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

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read·write·think

International Reading Association NCTE marcopolo

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Present-Day Native American Book List

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Buffalo Days*.Photographs by Lawrence Migdale. Holiday House, 1997. ISBN: 0823413276.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Pueblo Storyteller*. Photographs by Lawrence Migdale. Holiday House; 1991. ISBN: 0823408647.

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane. *Totem Pole*. Photographs by Lawrence Migdale. Holiday House;1990. ISBN: 0823408094.

King, Sandra. *Shannon: An Ojibway Dancer*. Photographs by Catherine Whipple. First Avenue Editions; 1993. ISBN: 0822596431.

Mercredi, Morningstar. *Fort Chipewyan Homecoming: A Journey to Native Canada*. Illustrated by Darren McNally. Lerner Publications Company; 1996. ISBN: 082252659X.

Peters, Russell. *Clambake: A Wampanoag Tradition*. Photographs by John Madama. Lerner Publications Company; 1992. ISBN: 0822526514.

Rendon, Marcie R. *Powwow Summer: A Family Celebrates the Circle of Life*. Photographs by Cheryl Walsh Bellville. Carolrhoda Books; 1996. ASIN: 0876149867.

Roessel, Monty. *Drumbeat...Heartbeat: A Celebration of the Powwow*. Photographs by Susan Braine. Lerner Publications Company; 1995. ISBN: 082259711X.

Roessel, Monty. *Kinaalda: A Navajo Girl Grows Up*. Lerner Publications Company; 1993. ISBN: 0822526557.

Roessel, Monty. *Songs from the Loom: A Navajo Girl Learns to Weave*. Lerner Publications Company; 1995. ISBN: 0822526573

Rose, Lavera. *Grandchildren of the Lakota*. Photographs by Cheryl Walsh Bellville. Carolrhoda Books; 1998. ASIN: 15750527.

Swentzell, Rina. *Children of Clay: A Family of Pueblo Potters*.Photographs by Bill Steen (Photographer). Lerner Publications Company; 1992. ISBN: 0822526549.

Wittstock, Laura Waterman. *Ininatig's Gift of Sugar: Traditional Native Sugarmaking*. Photographs by Dale Kakkak. Lerner Publications Company; 1993. ISBN: 0822526530.

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ERIC/EECE Publications — Digests

Teaching Young Children about Native Americans

Debbie Reese

EDO-PS-96-3
May 1996

Young children's conceptions of Native Americans often develop out of media portrayals and classroom role playing of the events of the First Thanksgiving. The conception of Native Americans gained from such early exposure is both inaccurate and potentially damaging to others. For example, a visitor to a child care center heard a four-year-old saying, "Indians aren't people. They're all dead." This child had already acquired an inaccurate view of Native Americans, even though her classmates were children of many cultures, including a Native American child.

Derman-Sparks (1989) asserts that by failing to challenge existing biases we allow children to adopt attitudes based on inaccuracies. Her book is a guide for developing curriculum materials that reflect cultural diversity. This digest seeks to build on this effort by focusing on teaching children in early childhood classrooms about Native Americans. Note that this digest, though it uses the term "Native American," recognizes and respects the common use of the term "American Indian" to describe the indigenous people of North America. While it is most accurate to use the tribal name when speaking of a specific tribe, there is no definitive preference for the use of "Native American" or "American Indian" among tribes or in the general literature.

Stereotypes Children See

Most young children are familiar with stereotypes of the Native American. Stereotypes are perpetuated by television, movies, and children's literature when they depict Native Americans negatively, as uncivilized, simple, superstitious, blood-thirsty savages, or positively, as romanticized heroes living in harmony with nature (Grant & Gillespie, 1992). The Disney Company presents both images in its films for children. For example, in the film *Peter Pan,* Princess Tiger Lily's father represents the negative stereotype as he holds Wendy's brothers hostage, while in the film *Pocahontas*, Pocahontas represents the positive stereotype who respects the earth and communicates with the trees and animals.

Many popular children's authors unwittingly perpetuate stereotypes. Richard Scarry's books frequently contain illustrations of animals dressed in buckskin and feathers, while Maurice Sendak's alphabet book includes an alligator dressed as an Indian. Both authors present a dehumanized image, in which anyone or anything can become Native American simply by putting on certain clothes. *Ten Little Rabbits,* although beautifully illustrated, dehumanizes Native Americans by turning them into objects for counting. *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* (Harris, 1993) contains a speech delivered by Chief Seattle of the Squamish tribe in the northwestern United States. However, Susan Jeffers' illustrations are of the Plains Indians, and include fringed buckskin clothes and teepees, rather than

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Squamish clothing and homes.

An Accurate Picture of Native Americans in the 1990s

Native Americans make up less than one percent of the total U.S. population but represent half the languages and cultures in the nation. The term "Native American" includes over 500 different groups and reflects great diversity of geographic location, language, socioeconomic conditions, school experience, and retention of traditional spiritual and cultural practices. However, most of the commercially prepared teaching materials available present a generalized image of Native American people with little or no regard for differences that exist from tribe to tribe.

Teaching Suggestions

When teachers engage young children in project work, teachers should choose concrete topics in order to enable children to draw on their own understanding. In teaching about Native Americans, the most relevant, interactive experience would be to have Native American children in the classroom. Such experience makes feasible implementing anti-bias curriculum suggestions. Teachers may want to implement the project approach (Katz & Chard, 1989), as it will allow children to carry on an in-depth investigation of a culture they have direct experience with. In these situations, teachers may prepare themselves for working with Native American families by engaging in what Emberton (1994) calls "cultural homework": reading current information about the families' tribe, tribal history, and traditional recreational and spiritual activities; and learning the correct pronunciation of personal names.

Positive Strategies

A number of positive strategies can be used in classrooms, regardless of whether Native American children are members of the class.

1. *Provide knowledge about contemporary Native Americans* to balance historical information. Teaching about Native Americans exclusively from a historical perspective may perpetuate the idea that they exist only in the past.

2. *Prepare units about specific tribes*, rather than units about "Native Americans." For example, develop a unit about the people of Nambe Pueblo, the Turtle Mountain Chippewa, the Potawotami. Ideally, choose a tribe with a historical or contemporary role in the local community. Such a unit will provide children with culturally specific knowledge (pertaining to a single group) rather than overgeneralized stereotypes.

3. *Locate and use books that show contemporary children of all colors engaged in their usual, daily activities* playing basketball, riding bicycles as well as traditional activities. Make the books easily accessible to children throughout the school year. Three excellent titles on the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico are: *Pueblo Storyteller*, by Diane Hoyt- Goldsmith; *Pueblo Boy: Growing Up in Two Worlds*, by Marcia Keegan; and *Children of Clay*, by Rina Swentzell.

4. *Obtain posters that show Native American children in contemporary contexts*, especially when teaching younger elementary children. When selecting historical posters for use with older children, make certain that the posters are culturally authentic and that you know enough about the tribe depicted to share authentic information with your students.

5. *Use "persona" dolls* (dolls with different skin colors) in the dramatic play area of the classroom on a daily basis. Dress them in the same clothing (t-shirts, jeans) children in the United States typically wear and bring out special clothing (for example, manta, shawl, moccasins, turquoise jewelry for Pueblo girls) for dolls only on special days.

6. *Cook ethnic foods* but be careful not to imply that all members of a particular group eat a specific food.

7. *Be specific about which tribes use particular items*, when discussing cultural artifacts (such as clothing or housing) and traditional foods. The Plains tribes use feathered headdresses, for example, but not all other tribes use them.

8. *Critique a Thanksgiving poster depicting the traditional, stereotyped pilgrim and Indian figures*, especially when teaching older elementary school children. Take care to select a picture that most children are familiar with, such as those shown on grocery bags or holiday greeting cards. Critically analyze the poster, noting the many tribes the artist has combined into one general image that fails to provide accurate information about any single tribe (Stutzman, 1993).

9. *At Thanksgiving, shift the focus away from reenacting the "First Thanksgiving."* Instead, focus on items children can be thankful for in their own lives, and on their families' celebrations of Thanksgiving at home.

Besides using these strategies in their classrooms, teachers need to educate themselves. MacCann (1993) notes that stereotyping is not always obvious to people surrounded by mainstream culture. Numerous guidelines have been prepared to aid in the selection of materials that work against stereotypes (for example, see Slapin and Seale [1993]).

Practices to Avoid

Avoid using over-generalized books, curriculum guides, and lesson plans; and teaching kits with a "Native American" theme. Although the goal of these materials is to teach about other cultures in positive ways, most of the materials group Native Americans too broadly. When seeking out materials, look for those which focus on a single tribe.

Avoid the "tourist curriculum" as described by Derman- Sparks. This kind of curriculum teaches predominantly through celebrations and seasonal holidays, and through traditional food and artifacts. It teaches in isolated units rather than in an integrated way and emphasizes exotic differences, focusing on specific events rather than on daily life.

Avoid presenting sacred activities in trivial ways. In early childhood classrooms, for example, a popular activity involves children in making headbands with feathers, even though feathers are highly religious articles for some tribes. By way of example, consider how a devout Catholic might feel about children making a chalice out of paper cups and glitter.

Avoid introducing the topic of Native Americans on Columbus Day or at Thanksgiving. Doing so perpetuates the idea that Native Americans do not exist in the present.

Conclusion

Much remains to be done to counter stereotypes of Native Americans learned by young children in our society. Teachers must provide accurate instruction not only about history but also about the contemporary lives of Native Americans.

Debbie Reese is a Pueblo Indian who studies and works in the field of early childhood education.

For More Information

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Emberton, S. (1994). Do Your Cultural Homework. Editorial. *National Center for Family Literacy Newsletter* 6:(3, Fall): 5-6.

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